



WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON INVASIVE SPECIES

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ALIEN SHRUBS INVADING WISCONSIN

MADISON – *Imagine roadsides and forests without the beautiful spring trillium displays. Picture our woodlands in 100 years, when invasive shrubs have prevented oak regeneration. When the old growth oaks die, all that will be left is an impenetrable thicket of alien shrubs!*

As you enjoy springtime activities around the state, you will undoubtedly become excited by the first leaves you see. Unfortunately, those leaves will likely be from two highly invasive shrubs called buckthorn and honeysuckle. These shrubs are well-established and rapidly spreading throughout Wisconsin, threatening natural areas such as woodlands, wetlands and prairies, as well as hunting areas and timber plantations. A 1996 WI-DNR Division of Forestry survey estimated that at least 570,000 acres of Wisconsin's timberland (public and private) have buckthorn present. As an invasive species, buckthorn and honeysuckle are a concern of Governor Jim Doyle. "Hunting and timber production are vital components of Wisconsin's economy," Governor Doyle said. "We must work to stop the expansion of buckthorn and honeysuckle in Wisconsin."

Common and glossy buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica* and *R. frangula*) and non-native honeysuckles (*Lonicera tartarica*, *L. morrowii*, *L. maackii* and *L. X bella*) can negatively impact our state's economic livelihood, recreational opportunities and natural areas by creating dense, impenetrable stands. These shrubs originate in northern Europe and Asia, where they evolved to open their leaves much earlier than our native North American trees and shrubs. They were introduced to North America in the 18th and 19th centuries for landscaping purposes, fencerows, and wildlife habitat, and have been dispersed across the landscape by birds, who find their berries appetizing. Once established, these shrubs have the potential to spread very aggressively because they thrive in habitats ranging from full sun to shade. In woodlands, their dense, early-spring shade has a particularly destructive effect on our wildflowers, such as trillium, and inhibits tree seedling establishment.

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Grasslands and wetlands can rapidly convert to impassible thickets with few if any native species remaining as the invaders shade out and eventually kill wildflowers and grasses.

In working forests, these aggressive invaders prevent oak and pine seedling establishment and can make logging operations more labor-intensive and costly. Fred Clark, President/Consulting Forester with Clark Forestry of Baraboo, warns that "Loss of overstory trees as a combined result of logging, diseases such as oak wilt, and lack of tree regeneration due to heavy competition with invasive shrubs, eventually results in conversion of forest to a shrub community, and this IS happening in many places now." Treatment of invasive shrubs on woodlots can cost \$500 to \$2,000 per acre. This only covers one-time treatments -- the long-term costs of control, as well as the loss of productivity of affected forests, can drive up these dollar figures. Governor Doyle has acknowledged this threat of lost productivity in the current state budget by requesting \$441,000 to combat the affects of invasive species in our state's timber lands.

In state hunting lands, habitat can be altered as grasslands and forest openings fill in with these shrubs, making it less desirable for many wild game species. Dense and thorny buckthorn thickets also inhibit hunters, often leaving their shirts in tatters, arms full of scratches, and game bags empty.

What can Wisconsin's citizens do? Help control the invasion of buckthorn and honeysuckle by manually or mechanically removing them from your property. Natural areas managers conduct controlled burns to suppress these invaders, and with proper training, resources, and necessary permits, some private property owners can conduct controlled burns as well. Also consider planting noninvasive native species when choosing new or replacement shrubs. Some native shrub species that you can plant instead of buckthorn and honeysuckle include: black chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*), Indian coral currant (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*), arrow-wood (*Viburnum dentatum*), and winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*).

The easiest way to identify the shrubs is in early spring as they are the first shrubs to produce leaves. Likewise in the fall, they are one of the last to shed their leaves. Buckthorn can also be identified by its small black berries and short thorns at the end of the twigs. Buckthorn has yellow sapwood and a pinkish to bright-orange heartwood. Honeysuckle stems are hollow, and their bark is pale and shredding. Honeysuckles flower in May and June, producing fragrant, pink and white, tubular flowers. They form yellow, orange, or red berries in late summer.

For more information on the control and identification of buckthorn and honeysuckle, see: The Invasive Plant Association of Wisconsin: <http://www.ipaw.org/invaders/foreigners.htm>; Wisconsin DNR: <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/er/invasive/nonnative>. For images, see: <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/invasives/photos/>.

Text for this news release was provided by the Invasive Plant Association of Wisconsin. This news release is sponsored by the Wisconsin Council on Invasive Species. The Wisconsin State Legislature created the Council, to which Governor Doyle appointed 13 members. The Council's mission is to prevent and reduce the harmful impacts of invasive species on Wisconsin's environment and economy, as well as human well-being. Funding for this news release was provided by the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program and the Natural Resource Foundation's C.D. Besadny Conservation Grant Program.